

We claim:

1. An online listing presentation process comprising:
allowing a seller of an item to specify a minimum sales price;
soliciting bids for the item while concealing the seller-specified minimum sales price;
detecting when a received bid is close to the seller-specified minimum price; and
notifying at least one of the bidder and the seller upon detection of said closeness.
2. The process of claim 1 wherein said notifying does not reveal how close the bid is to the seller-specified minimum price.
3. The process of claim 1 wherein the notifying does not reveal at least the seller-specified minimum price but does reveal when the specified bid is close to the seller-specified minimum price.
4. The process of claim 1 wherein said detecting uses a variable threshold for detecting closeness.
5. The method as in claim 4 wherein said detecting selects, in a manner that is difficult for the seller and the bidder to predict, a closeness threshold within a range and uses said closeness threshold to detect closeness.
6. The method as in claim 5 wherein a closeness threshold ranges from 9% to 16%.
7. The method as in claim 5 wherein said range is based on percentage of the seller-specified minimum price.
8. The method of claim 1 wherein said notifying encourages said bidder and said seller to negotiate outside of bidding.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein said notifying encourages the bidder and seller to personally meet.
10. The method as claim 1 wherein said notifying encourages said bidder and said seller to have telephone conversation.
11. An online listing system comprising:

an auction-style listing database that stores auction-style listing information including a seller-specified minimum price;

an online user interface presentation module that presents auction-style listing information while concealing said seller-specified minimum price, and gives potential buyers an opportunity to submit bids;

a closeness testing arrangement that tests whether submitted bids are close to seller-specified minimum prices;

a messaging service that provides notification to buyers and/or sellers conditioned on said closeness testing.

12. The system as in claim 11 wherein said messaging service does not reveal either the seller-specified minimum prices.

13. The system as in claim 11 wherein said presentation arrangement receives and registers proxy bids.

14. The system as in claim 11 wherein said closeness tester uses a substantially unpredictable closeness threshold for testing.

15. The system as in claim 14 wherein said closeness tester selects a variable closeness threshold within a range.

16. The system as in claim 11 wherein said messaging arrangement sends e-mails to both bidder and seller for auction-style listings that are close, and if the seller issues an offer to the bidder, temporarily suspends bidding on the listing.

17. The system as in claim 11 wherein said messaging arrangement encourages bidders and sellers to conduct an out-of-channel price negotiation.

18. The system as in claim 11 wherein said messaging arrangement temporarily suspends auction-style listings in response to said testing, and resumes said auction-style listings if sales do not result from the notifications.

19. The method of processing online auction-style listings comprising:
setting a predetermined listing and time;
receiving bids before said listing and time;

automatically extending said predetermined end time if a bid is received near the end time.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein said automatically extending further extends said end time upon receiving additional bids.

21. An online auction-style listing service comprising:
maintaining a database of auction-style listings, said database including geographical location of listed items;
requesting a potential bidder to input the bidder's geographical location;
and
searching said database for and displaying primarily items that are within proximity to the bidder's geographical location.

22. The method as in claim 21 wherein said potential bidder specifies location with zip code, and said method further includes calculating a geographical proximity based at least in part on the specified zip code.

23. A method of providing online auction-style listings comprising:
maintaining a database of items available for auction-style listing;
allowing sellers to specify whether items are to be listed in said database as conditional or binding transactions; and:
displaying the conditional or binding characteristic of an item listing with other information relating to the item.

24. A method of providing online listing services comprising:
maintaining at least one database of items listed for sale;
displaying at least some of said items in a classified advertising listing format;
displaying at least others of said items in an auction-style listing format;
allowing sellers to flexibly change selected item listings between said classified advertising and said auction-style listing formats.

25. A method of providing online transaction services comprising:
storing auction-style listings in a database;
allowing potential bidders to search through and selectively display at least some of said database contents;

accepting bids from users and providing at least some information concerning said bids to corresponding sellers;
allowing sellers whose items have been bid upon to issue offers to sell to corresponding bidders;
temporarily suspending auction-style listings for predetermined durations when corresponding offers to sell are outstanding.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein said service allows sellers to issue offers to sell to high bidders before listing expiration, and allows sellers to issue offers to sell to any bidders after a listing expiration.

27. The method of claim 25 wherein said service allows sellers to issue set offers to sell after auction-style listing expiration.

28. A method of providing online auction-style listings comprising:
storing information concerning items for sale in a database;
selectively presenting information concerning said items on web pages in auction-style listing formats that solicit bids;
allowing bidders to rate sellers;
giving sellers a predetermined time period for contacting and satisfying bidders before publicly posting said ratings.

29. A method of providing advertising for items for sale comprising:
storing listing information relating to items for sale;
allowing perspective purchasers to search said stored information and select a subset of said items for display;
displaying information about at least some of said items in a classified advertising listing format; and
displaying information of said items in an interactive advertising presentation format.

30. The method as in claim 29 wherein said interactive advertising presentation format comprises an auction-style listing format.

31. A method of presenting online item advertising comprising:

allowing sellers to select between different listing formats; while facilitating sellers filling in information on selected formats, including providing a builder tool in the form of a pop-up window, said builder tool including pre-specified phrases selectable using hypertext links, seller selection of said phrases causing said phrases to be inserted into said listing format.

32. The method as in claim 31 wherein said seller may customize said phrases by defining seller preferences.

33. A method of providing online auction-style listings comprising:
accepting information from a seller for listing an item for sale auction - style;

allowing the seller to specify at least one of auction listing start time/date and listing and time/date; and

further allowing said seller to program listing duration.

34. A method as in claim 33 wherein said further allowing allows said seller to specify listing duration within a range.

35. A method of presenting auction-style listings comprising:
prompting a seller for information concerning an item to be listed for sale auction-style, said prompting including prompting the seller to upload plural images and allowing said seller to specify a caption for each of said images; and

displaying said prompted information in an auction-style listing format including said images and associated captions.

36. A method of providing auction-style listing services comprising:
storing the information concerning items listed for sale auction-style;
allowing at least one seller to selectively block bids from particular parties; and

accepting bids for items while refusing bids from said particular parties.

37. A method of providing auction-style listing services comprising:
presenting auction-style listings on line;
receiving bids associated with said auction-style listing; and

allowing a seller associated with a predetermined listing to cancel a received bid.

38. A method of providing online auction-style listing services comprising:

storing information relating to items for sale auction-style
scheduling auction-style listing and times associated with said listed items; and

allowing authorized sellers to end auction-style listings prior to said end times.